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SUBJECT: WESTERWELLE CASTS FDP AS COALITION ALTERNATIVE

Classified By: Political M/C John Bauman for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶1. (U) Summary:** Seeking to return to federal government after a 9-year absence, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) has placed all bets on Guido Westerwelle, whom party delegates resoundingly re-elected as national party chairman at its national convention in Stuttgart on June 15. Westerwelle -- who received 87 percent of the votes while running unopposed -- reportedly wishes to become Foreign Minister in the next federal government. In an effort to win the support of more middle class voters, the FDP promoted a family-friendly platform and portrayed itself as a centrist coalition alternative. The CDU's recent rise in popularity has fueled speculation of a future CDU/FDP partnership on the national level after the next federal elections in 2009; however the electorate remains almost evenly divided between the CDU/FDP and the SPD/Left/Greens. End summary.

**¶2. (C)** Juxtaposed on the same weekend as the convention of the new Left Party (septel), the FDP championed the theme "Freedom Instead of Socialism." Widely viewed as the party of the affluent, promoting tax cuts and economic competitiveness, the FDP is attempting to broaden its base by promoting family values -- for example, it favors government support of child care, albeit with vouchers instead of cash payments. Curiously, the party allotted nearly a full day to a discussion on promoting culture by way of public support of the arts. Parliamentarian Markus Loening indicated that Westerwelle wants the FDP to be seen as the party of culture -- an issue which, Loening claims, has not yet been secured by any other party. Loening admitted that the focus on culture was unlikely, by itself, to garner more votes for the party.

Westerwelle: The Next Foreign Minister?

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**¶3. (C)** Guido Westerwelle is positioning himself to become Foreign Minister in the next federal government, according to Helmut Metzner, the FDP's chief campaign strategist. Although not known in the past as a foreign policy expert, Westerwelle has been studying foreign policy issues closely and plans to speak extensively about such issues at the next party convention in Munich in May 2008. According to our contacts, if the FDP has a foreign policy role in a future government, we can expect a commitment to trans-Atlantic relations and to NATO as the principal security apparatus. The FDP, and Westerwelle specifically, has been cautious about foreign military deployments, but would likely continue to support both OEF and ISAF in Afghanistan, with the condition that greater attention be placed on civil reconstruction. On missile defense, the FDP supports a European approach to the issue.

Jockeying for a Place in the Next National Government

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¶4. (U) Westerwelle's political future depends on bringing the FDP back into federal government. His party expects him to lead a successful campaign and win a place in the next government. The most natural fit is with the CDU/CSU, with which the FDP governed from 1982 to 1998. The FDP -- holding steady in the polls at 8 to 10 percent -- is also considering other constellations, such as the so-called "traffic light" (with the SPD and the Greens) and "Jamaica" (with CDU and the Greens) coalitions. Many inside and outside the FDP, however, are skeptical that such three-party coalitions are workable. For the moment, the FDP's coalition calculus centers on criticizing the Grand Coalition as ineffective, the CDU/CSU as too social democratic, and the SPD as too far left.

¶5. (U) Comment: Appeals to the middle class might gain the FDP some votes, but these might come mostly from CDU supporters, and therefore not help the FDP's chances to get back into government. (Note: Germany now is just about evenly divided between left and right, according to polls and Bundestag seats. End note.) Appealing to those further on the right (i.e., the right-extremists) is neither respectable nor under consideration. A resurgent CDU, however, which has drawn voters into the conservative/liberal camp from the SPD, could pull the FDP into government on its coattails. End comment.

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